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By
PAUL BROMBERG







DECORATIVE ARTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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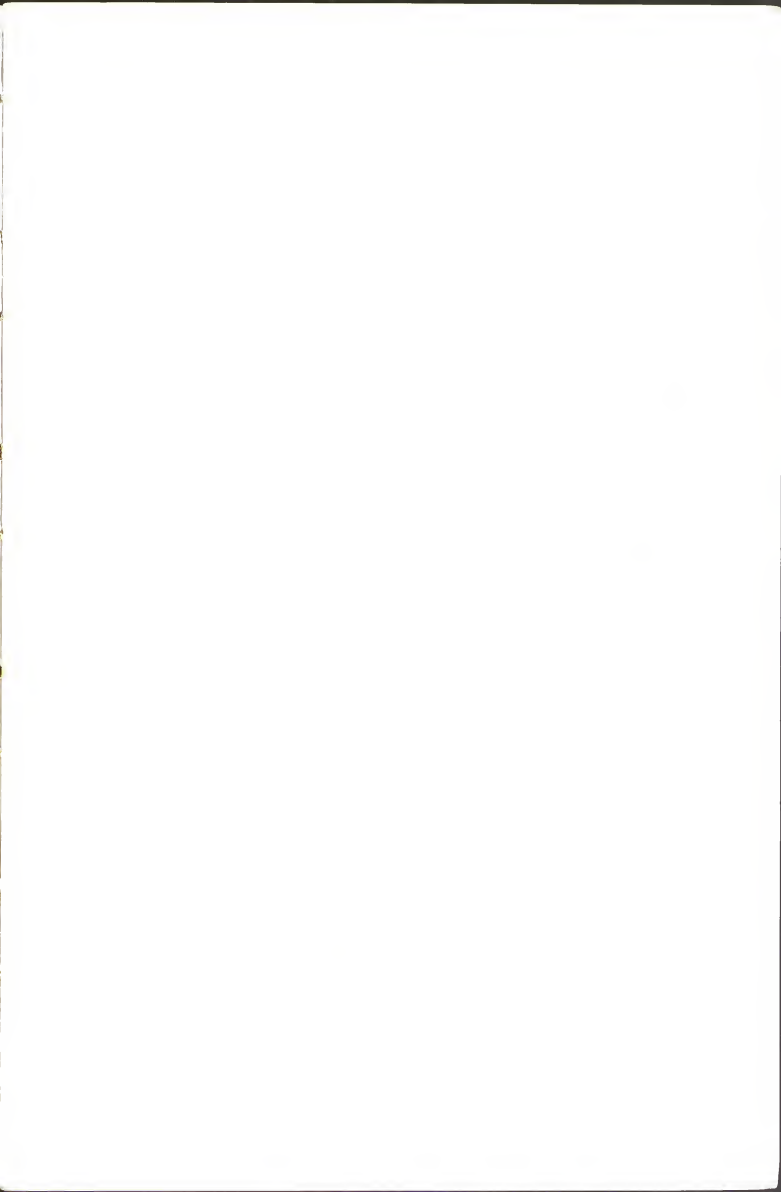
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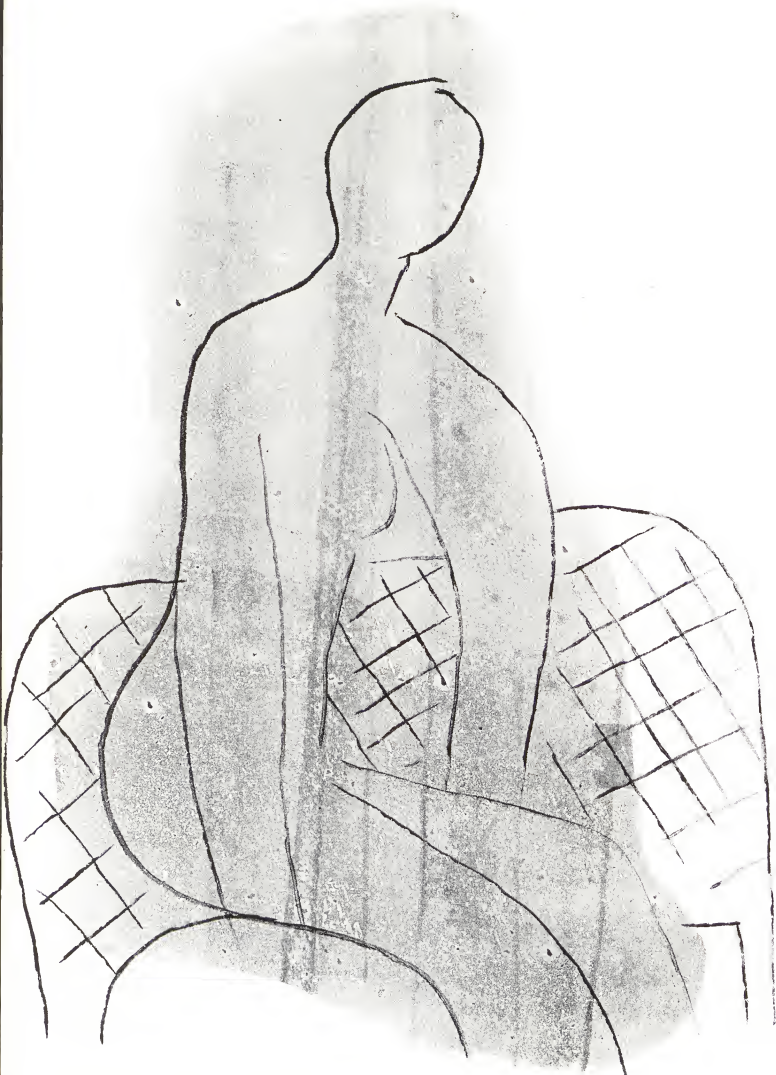
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Decorative Arts in the Netherlands
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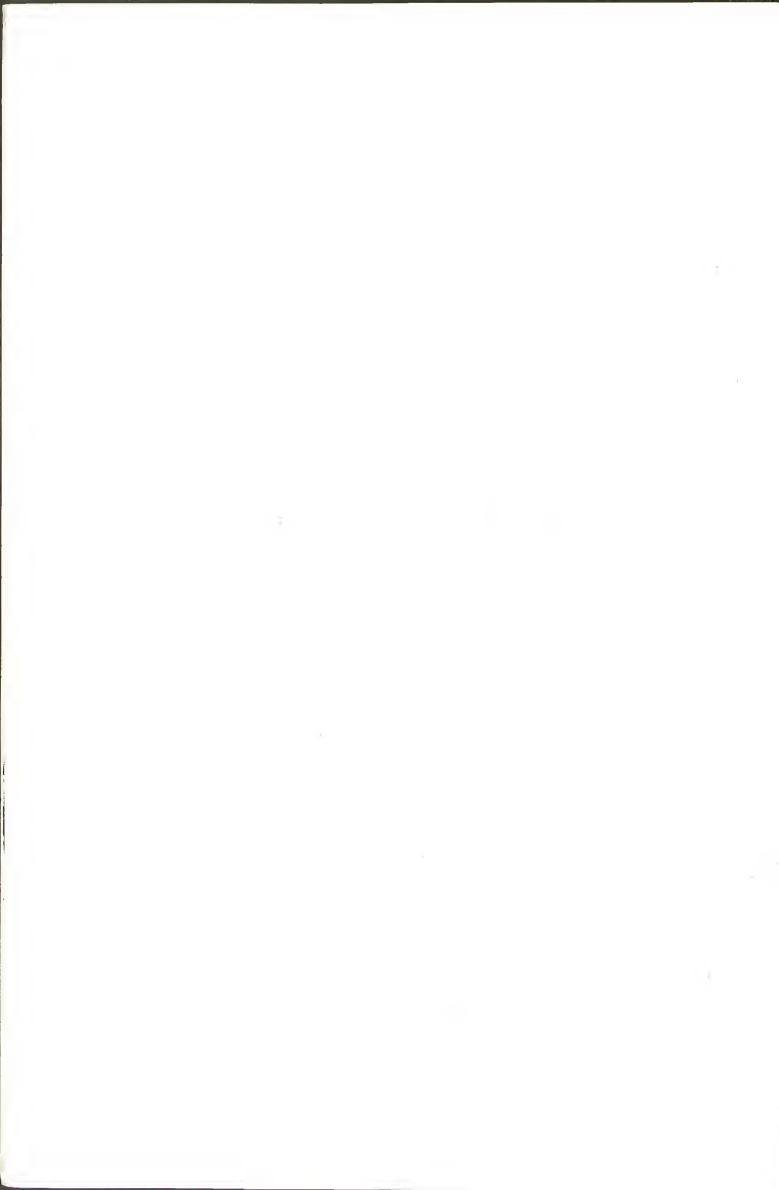
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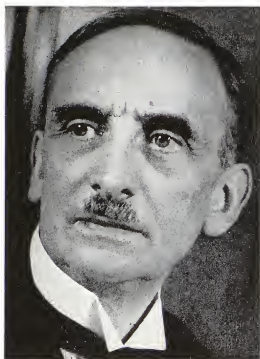
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JAN FRANÇOIS VAN ROYEN

IN MEMORIAM

It is impossible to write about the development of Netherlands industrial arts without commemorating briefly the man who has contributed more than anyone else to that development, namely Dr. J. F. van Royen.

That the Netherlands, in the years between the World Wars, occupied such a prominent position in European industrial art, is due to a considerable extent to Van Royen's capability and energy.

By way of introduction I therefore wish to begin this book with a few personal recollections of this great Netherlander, who fell as a victim of German violence.

A large hall-like room with high, white windows. Against the wall near the entrance there stands a tremendous cabinet—Penaat's contribution to the modern revival of the furniture art.

Parallel with the wall, which contains huge windows, is a conference table, and at the far end of the room, stately in the center of the main wall and flanked by a high wooden sculpture by Zadkine, behind a fine sculptured desk with adjoining tables piled high with books, files, and telephone instruments, buzzers, intercommunication instruments, . . . Van Royen.

That is how I saw him the first time. A man with a sharp, animated head, a curious mixture of fanaticism and calculating, diplomatic self-control. A determined outline characterized the powerful lines of the mouth, but when he took off his glasses I discovered a gentle, weary glance in his eyes. He leaned forward a little on his almost feminine slender hands; the fingers played with a file, which lay in an expectant position before him.

That is how I saw him also for the last time—ten years later, a few days before my departure for America. It was the same room, the same bare white walls, the same animated glance, the same weary eyes. I know now, although it is difficult to comprehend it, that it was for the last time.

For one and one-half years during the Occupation Van Royen employed his skill, his tact, his love, and his courage to aid the artists in Holland in their hopeless conflict against the barbarians. Finally his death was demanded; a few days after being apprehended at Amersfoort he was murdered in cowardly fashion.

He was an extremely competent statesman; he saw many ministers come and go, and he had to teach the ropes to many Directors-General of the Posts, Telegraph, and Telephone, for his office as Secretary-General of the P. T. T. actually placed the management of the tremendous institution on his shoulders. However, I saw him only in his function as intermediary between the government and artists, as a promoter who conceived of his powerful government position as an opportunity to serve the cause of art in Holland in a sensible, but on that account no less courageous and unselfish manner.

Jan François van Royen was born in Arnhem on June 27, 1878. He studied law in Leyden and received the degree of Master there. Before I came to know Van Royen personally I had already heard much about his devotion to the Beautiful Book, and I had discovered his noble artistry in the splendid printed works which he had made on his own press and which were on exhibition in the Municipal Museum at Amsterdam, together

with his Silver Thistle edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, dating from 1913.

In 1906 he improved the appearance of the blank forms used at post offices. The first modern postage stamp, designed in 1913 by K. P. C. de Bazel, was produced as a result of his initiative.

The Government was drawn by him into the sphere of interests of applied arts; and in consequence of this a regulation was adopted by which a portion of the construction cost of government projects could be allotted as commissions to artists. He brought together the various groups of artists into a great union, which could present a common front toward the authorities and the public with respect to commissions, exhibitions, and social provisions.

Van Royen was a chairman of large caliber; his technique in presiding over a meeting was astounding in its masterly perfection. Yet, although he called together meetings evening after evening, it was by no means for the pleasure of making that technique crackle like fireworks of virtuosity. He saw his task clearly—the improvement of the position of artists in Holland, and he discerned clearly his diplomatic way of attaining that end. Only his co-workers know in how many hundred ways he tried to establish contacts between artist organizations mutually and between official bureaus and groups of artists.

What made a still stronger impression on us than his never-failing eloquence and precise formulations was his unquenchable enthusiasm and optimism. There were the artist groups which protested against being drawn into a relief system on the same basis as laborers; there were ultra-modern, modern, and conservative architects, sculptors, and artisans, who did not wish to be included in a single group; there were community and government authorities who opposed in lukewarm and frequently even hostile fashion his attempts to make art a government matter; there were manufacturers who either did not desire any collaboration with artists at all or who did not wish to bring that collaboration into the form of organized union.

Van Royen was never discouraged when his plans failed; he immediately sought another way to venture a new attempt. So great a driving power of idealism was actually a revelation to his collaborators. The curious thing was that his actions gave no indication of this. He remained the unruffled, reserved "lib-

eral aristocrat" who dominated the situation and remained superior to emotions.

I have preserved the most personal impressions of the amusing, exciting, interesting, and intimate meetings of the editors of *Prisma der Kunsten*, the organ of the united artists' associations. Although the editorial board included representatives of numerous painters' guilds, musicians' organizations, groups of sculptors, architects, and artisans, the meetings generally remained limited to chairman Van Royen, the publisher, and the secretary of the editorial board, in which capacity I had to act. There were always two chief problems: How could the publisher be induced again to print one more number? and secondly: How could we get rid of the unusable articles which the affiliated organizations submitted in the conviction that they should positively be presented to the public?

When I turn the pages of the volumes of *Prisma*, I bow my head in deep respect for my master. He solved the problems during two full years.

They were delightful meetings, in which Van Royen repeatedly clutched his head to hold fast an idea—one of his gestures which always indicated an animated mood. They were gatherings at which I acquired profound knowledge in self-control and dealing with people, particularly publishers. Van Royen succeeded in keeping the deficit constantly growing and the paper constantly improving.

Van Royen heroically resisted in Holland the intrusion of the barbarians into the art life which he had built up and cherished. It is not sufficient for us to honor Van Royen's memory; we must continue his work. That is the bounden duty of the artists and of the Government.



FIG. 11. BERT NIENHUIS — Vase, shrinkled glaze, in pearl-gray and shades of gray and red.

I N OUR TIME, arts and crafts are executed, understood and appreciated differently than in times gone by. Then, there existed a close contact between maker and user. Each object was specially made to fit the individual needs and purposes of the purchaser. Handicraftsman and user chatted pleasantly in the open workshop on the street and discussed the work as it developed in the hands of the master. By the time the object was finished and ready to leave the workshop, the customer fully understood the expression achieved and the difficulties mastered. Made in this way, the object not only provided the highest degree of usefulness, but also an approach to beauty. The craftsman fully realized his task. It was the love of his work that urged him along.

The tradition of his "atelier", often transmitted from father to son over many generations, guided him and helped him to master his material and control his technic. The ever changing demands of utility prevented him from spiritlessly copying old form. But how times have changed! Though the artists' task remains the same, that is, to create an object which gives the user both utility and enjoyment of beauty, radical changes in our times affect the making, selecting and using of the object and considerably complicate the task of the artist. As a result, there are very few objects which successfully combine function and beauty.

This pamphlet attempts to give the reader some insight into these changed conditions of work and to prove that, in our time, too, it is possible with the assistance of

the artist to achieve a harmony of purpose and beauty in the arts and crafts.

To understand and enjoy arts and crafts in our time, we must comprehend the influence exerted upon us by our new way of living. We must realize that the hasty tempo of our lives deprives us of the opportunity to observe attentively. This is true to such an extent that to find the balance of mind necessary to experience the emotion of beauty, we are often forced to take ourselves firmly in hand. We must also understand that, in the selection of objects, this hurried way of living, frequently bordering on superficiality, influences us far too often to base our appreciation on outward appearance only. Where knowledge of material, form, and manufacture are absent tempting prices and superficial finery guide our selection. Thus today the attachment of the user for the object has weakened considerably, even to the point where he does not hesitate to exchange these objects with every season.

However, the public is not without guidance if it would avail itself of it: the guidance of the artist. The artist is eminently fitted to draw attention to the essential values of an object of utility. The objects of utility made by him or under his supervision are called applied art. It is an error to think as many do that the artist's cooperation should be sought only for the decoration of the object. The decorative arts and the applied arts verge closely upon one another, as we learn so vividly from handicrafts in former times when maker and user were in direct contact with each other. True enough, in those times the object was formed in a way to satisfy all the demands of utility, yet it was the spirit of the artist expressing itself through ornament, color, and use of material that gave the added value of decoration to the object.

In our times, however, production is guided by the commercial considerations of mass supply and demand. Objects often lack utility because utility is not asked for as a primary quality. The buyer does not know enough of the factors which make an object functional. He knows neither construction nor material. The fact that an object of utility may also give aesthetic enjoyment is largely overlooked. Not so with the artist. His sole goal is to strive for rounded perfection in his work. Because of his responsibility as a designer of mechanically made products, his demands in our time differ greatly from those of the manufacturer. In contrast with the manufacturer who likes to use the machine to add decoration to an object as a stimulation to buying, the artist wants to use the machine to achieve precise forms and fitness for purpose.

If indeed the cultural standard of a people can be judged from its objects of use, then it must be admitted that the Dutch have a very highly developed culture. Their objects of utility, even those in possession of the working classes are, in great part, applied art. This is not to claim, of course, that objects which neglect function for decoration are never offered for sale in Dutch stores. It is, however, unmistakably clear that more and more it has become a Dutch custom to draw the artist into the production process and that more and more public buying is guided by standards of utility, purity of form, good proportion and attractive rendering of material. This increasing demand for applied art is extremely important, because minds once made receptive to purity of form cannot longer be satisfied by objects of coarse alloy.

It is quite possible to possess a masterwork and several works of less importance, but it is not possible to surround oneself with senseless, primped up objects and

fine objects of applied art at one and the same time. As soon as the appreciation of good objects penetrated broad layers of the Dutch people, a strong industrial development took place. This industrial art consisted not only of mechanically made objects with the artist acting as designer and supervisor but also of objects made entirely by the artist himself. Still, appreciation for applied arts must become even more general, and the many existing obstacles in the way of closer cooperation between artist and manufacturer must be overcome. Many manufacturers try to find a solution to the problem by establishing special departments for handicraft. However, the real solution can only be found in developing the taste of the public.

In Holland this was already attempted before the war in many different ways in which the Dutch government played an important role. During the difficult years of the depression, the government granted commissions to artists. It thus achieved a twofold purpose. The artists received support and the people's taste developed in contact with the artist's work which they had a chance to see in many public buildings. Of course, there was always the danger that the work might be given not to the most capable artist but to the one who most urgently needed support. Such a hazard was prevented by the unforgettable Dr. J. F. van Royen, the great friend of all artists. He induced the government to spend 2% of all amounts allowed for public buildings and buildings erected with government aid, for commissions to be given only to the more gifted artists. These subsidies were paid for from the sale of stamps for charitable purposes.

Many other ways to stimulate the applied arts existed. The trade unions of the applied artists in cooperation with other art organizations and groups of architects or-

ganized many exhibitions, lectures and work-demonstrations, all of which attracted considerable public attention. Finally, the full cooperation of the universities and the press with evening courses and feature articles contributed greatly to the development of public taste. Practically all newspapers and periodicals ran special columns which helped readers to understand applied art. The part which the press took upon itself deserves special acknowledgment because it never succumbed to the interests of the advertiser. The press stood united in the outstanding guidance it offered the public against any imitation of style or material. As an example of how strongly the benefits of the development of good taste were recognized, the bi-annual Fair in Utrecht must be cited.

The committee of the Fair put at the disposal of the applied artists and the union for art in industry a large part of an entire floor in the exhibition building where good examples of applied art could be exhibited. Although these exhibitions were run on a purely commercial basis, participating manufacturers who had high expenses to pay, never protested that their colleagues who worked with artists had an opportunity to exhibit without charge. This generous attitude towards the artist is partly accounted for by the honest position of the union for the artists of applied art. This union, like any other union, had to strive for better financial working conditions. However, they made good professional knowledge their first demand. A creation of this union was the Institute for arts and crafts which possessed a collection of works of all artists, members or not. This Institute and the Advisory Council gave impartial advice about artists who were being considered for work to be executed. Publication also of the work of non-members and complete impartiality in recommending members as well

as non-members did not fail to show results. More and more people made use of the opportunity to call for advice.

It is quite understandable that a large part of the Dutch people showed great interest in arts and crafts and also in the applied arts. We must realize that in Holland arts and crafts and applied arts reached a high ascendancy because of their close relationship to architecture, both developing together. When we try to explain in a brief outline the main movements of the development of modern applied art in Holland, we touch constantly the territory of architecture. The rebirth of architecture which took place in the beginning of this era, and in which the Netherlands played an important part, resulted from the conception, that in architecture construction, purpose, and material must be clearly expressed.

This rebirth was a reaction from the period of style imitation where construction, purpose and material were blurred and unrecognizable under the mask of imitation of building styles of the past. The great significance of Dr. P. J. H. Cuypers, the enthusiastic pupil and follower of Viollet le Duc, lay in his more honest application of the crafts to his buildings. Berlage, in an even stronger way, accentuated the significance of honest construction and honest use of materials. In the stormy years of the beginning of this era, artists together with their fellow-men believed in the beginning of a new and better society.

Under the pretense of love for antique beauty the sins of poor construction and poor proportions were covered up by a potpourri of outmoded styles. In this period of renewal the artist's main ambition was honesty in his creation, and this very manifestation of honesty winding its way through all forms of art expression, found itself especially strongly expressed in architecture and

applied arts. The wish was not anymore to imitate old styles but to find a new style.

The difficulty of expressing oneself in an entirely new way avoiding earlier existing forms, may be likened to the difficulties of a person who chooses to express himself no longer in an existing language. A new language cannot be produced by magic, a new language must grow; thus also with a new style. In Holland the soil for the growth of a new style was extremely fertile, because the enthusiasm of the artists made the development of strong impulsive forces possible. We can observe this in many ways in the applied arts. The artists once more wanted to execute their craft themselves. They were not satisfied any longer only to design at their drawing board.

In order to be able to design furniture adapted to the new processes of production, craftsmen took upon themselves the study of cabinetmaking for years in a row. A famous Dutch art professor was no longer content to create designs for stained glass painting, but went himself to the workshop to manage the actual procedure of glass painting and glass firing. Besides the endeavor to rehabilitate the crafts, there developed also a new and strong feeling about the connection between the decorative elements of a building with its architecture as a whole. Artists tried to unite their sculpture, murals, and stained glass windows closely with the work of the architect. It had been a long time since artists felt this necessity. They also tried to choose subjects for their decorative treatments which were derived from reality.

The decorative arts strove to embrace the life of their own time and its human aspect. The new spirit revealed itself in the arts and crafts, where the artist was also the producer, as well as in the applied arts where mechanical production took over the work of the hands. One of the greatest Dutch architects, K. P. C. de Bazel experimented

for four years (1910-1914) in the glass factory of Leerdam. Today his creations in glass work still rank among the finest ever made for daily use.

In 1892 the first attempt was made for cooperation of artists and manufacturers at the factory of Fentener van Vlissingen at Helmond, where a well-known artist designed chintz for mass production. The wish to bring beauty to the masses was without doubt the stimulant. Rugs, executed by the famous Royal United Carpet Factories in Rotterdam were also designed by artists. A most revolutionary impression was made on the public by the new way of home furnishing. The same principles of integrity in construction and use of materials were applied and no style imitations were tolerated. Because the domain of home furnishing includes so many objects it afforded a marvelous opportunity for artistic creation. But nothing already existing could be used. A typical example of the difficulties which had to be met lies in the tale of how architects were forced to use the back-side of existing fancy wall papers in order to obtain a wall paper that was plain. The new situation in the artist's world called for the founding of a centre where craftsmen could work together and at the same time exhibit their products. This centre, however, was not able to overcome all the difficulties which generally face such an enterprise. In the beginning of the movement, when people first became interested in modern homes with modern furnishings, the demand was not great enough to make mass-production of modern objects feasible. Production on a small scale was too expensive, and even more so because it was experimental. Thus, these modern objects did not reach the home of the common man for which they had been primarily conceived.

Objects made by the artist or made under his supervision, were of excellent quality, because good construc-

tion was one of the new ideals. More beautiful materials than ever were used because expression of material and purity of form had become most important. These factors lent objects unprecedented charm and added the stamp of culture.

Architecture, applied arts, and the arts and crafts, all underwent a renewal at the same time. The new movement, as mentioned before, was a reaction against the tasteless imitation and mixing up of old style forms. However, it was also a recognition of the subordination of the applied arts. This subordination which in architecture put honest construction and honest expression of material in the foreground, also made new demands upon ornament. A naturalistic design was considered to be too much an imitation of reality. People did not want to walk over a carpet decorated with flowers, seemingly real.

The simplicity in architecture (Fig. 1. Stock Exchange by Dr. H. P. Berlage) expressed itself also in all the other applied arts. Architects were driven by an enormous élan, but it was an intellectual enthusiasm. The urge to create was under the strict censorship of reason. However, the foundation was laid for a new style which still had to prove it had sufficient vitality to break the chains of dogma. Now after half a century we know that this style indeed possessed such vitality. We know that this style has freed itself from a dogma for approach.

Today we also know that for a short period (1915-1925) this style showed a fantastic irrationality. This period, introduced by the gaudy architecture of a few young architects, was named the "Amsterdam School."

Ornament was uncontrolled and wild. The cultured public did not admire these extravagances, but the war-profiteers ordered generously because it demonstrated their newly acquired wealth. This period attracted the



FIG. 1. DR. H. P. BERLAGE—Stock Exchange, Damrak, Amsterdam (1898-1903). The beginning of a new era in architecture which expressed itself also in the applied and industrial arts.



FIG. 2. DR. H. P. BERLAGE—Interior Stock Exchange Amsterdam with mural of Jan Toorop. Typical example of uncovered brick walls to emphasize the visible construction.



FIG. 3. ELOY JAN AND LEO BROM—Baptismal font. Handicraft was always stimulated by religious art.



FIG. 1. J. KRIEGE—Silver chalice. Most religious art is made as a "pièce unique," to serve a special purpose.



FIG. 5. CHARLES EYK—Fragment of mural. In murals, stained glass, tapestries, art forgery and embroideries for religious purposes the artist was always given an opportunity to develop his decorative talent.



FIG. 6. JOEP NICOLAS—Stained glass painting. In the Nicolas generation this technic became a tradition.



FIG. 7. JOEP NICOLAS—Stained glass brick tiles open promising perspectives in the field of architecture.



FIG. 8. HILDEGARD BROM FISCHER — Mural tapestry, designed and executed as embroidery.

attention of the world to Holland's architecture which indeed showed great imagination. Luckily this interest remained long after the decorative extravagances disappeared. Even more important for us is the fact that the initial structure of the style remained although the accent was transferred from honest construction to function. In architecture emphasis on the visible construction of a building (for which the inside walls of Berlage constructed of uncovered bricks, became proverbial, Fig. 2) gave way to emphasizing the function.

Each beginning of a period, in order to manifest itself forcefully, must be fanatically onesided and exaggerated, and this period preaching fitness for purpose as it did could not tolerate any ornament in the beginning. Decoration was stigmatized as a superfluous addition. But the fine arts could not be placed under this ban, and wherever the applied arts approached the fine arts the ban on ornament was strictly enforced.

In the realm of religious art especially, decorative art found a home. In religious art subjection to function is less fixed because there many traditions connected with function demand decoration. (Fig. 3. Baptismal font by Eloy Jan and Leo Brom; Fig. 4. Holy supper cup.) In murals (Fig. 5. Stained glass, Figs. 6 and 7) and tapestries (Fig. 8) for the Catholic church the artist always had an opportunity to develop his decorative spirit. The subjection to applied arts was more a stimulant than a handicap. In religious art handicraft always played a greater part than the machine.

Most religious art is made as a "*pièce unique*". Both handicraft and machine have their own significance for the applied arts, but they stand strictly separated though next to each other. Their capacities are different, the results are different, the demands made upon their products are different. It is necessary for a good compre-

hension of the applied arts to observe the differences clearly. For much of existing bad taste must be charged to lack of understanding. Wherever the machine tries to imitate handicraft, the result is always doomed to failure.

For instance, in the furniture industry there exists a so-called sculpture machine. This machine consists of a series of coupled chisels each following the movements of one chisel directed by a laborer. He makes the "leader-chisel" follow the outlines of a piece of sculpture which is destined to be multiplied, let us say the head of a lion. The model in question is a fine piece of sculpture, sensitively cut, full of nuances and expressions. How did these nuances, these expressions come into being? The sculptor transferred his feelings to the material with each sensitive small beat of the gouge chisel. Compare it with the touch of a pianist. The ever so untraceable difference between the artist's touch and the touch of the average player produces an enormous difference in expression, that difference which fills the concert hall with people who want to enjoy the revealing playing of the true artist.

This great, qualitative difference accomplished by the fine pianist when he touches the keys is the same as that achieved by the sculptor when he presses on his chisel. It goes without saying that this sensitivity is lost when a little regiment of coupled chisels deals out somewhat similar-looking blows. Subtlety, nuance, detail, all mediums of emotion vanish together with the original skill of the artist-sculptor. The same can be observed with the pressing or casting of an ornament in order to reproduce an ornamented handicraft product mechanically. Too much is lost of the indescribably fine and nervously expressed work of the hands. But does the sculptor himself not make a cast of his model in bronze? Is this not

also a reproduction? And yet the utmost sensitivity is preserved in the cast. We must however realize that the making of such a cast is not a mechanical but a handicraft procedure requiring the sensitiveness of an artist. As soon as the process of casting is left to the machine, individual treatment of each casting disappears. The sensitive details are lost: ornamentation becomes coarse and flat. However, where forms without ornament are involved mechanical production becomes an excellent medium.

For instance the taut lines of a modern telephone are extremely well suited for expression by means of the machine, because the machine is vastly more efficient than the hands in the production of exact forms. In this rigidity lies the value of mechanical production, not to speak of its economic advantages. Hands are not able to offer evenness, but it is their sensitive agility that is transferred to an object. Besides this, there is one more great technical difference. A machine, once set, repeats the same action a thousand times with the same facility. But to "set" a machine or to prepare it for changed action, is difficult and takes much time. Not so with the hands. The hands as the executing power of our active minds, like to change from one action to another. The change of the woof for a machine-spun yarn happens seldom. That is why such a woof becomes very regular. On the handloom, to the contrary, the changing of the woof happens often. It is simple. The creative mind likes to play with the possibilities of change. Therefore hand-spun weaving is full of variation (Fig. 9). The same contrast is noticeable in all other branches of applied arts. A ceramic product in a factory is formed by mechanical processes such as turning, stamping, and casting. But the ceramic product is formed by the artist's hand, even if he needed the help of the potter's wheel. His hands pull

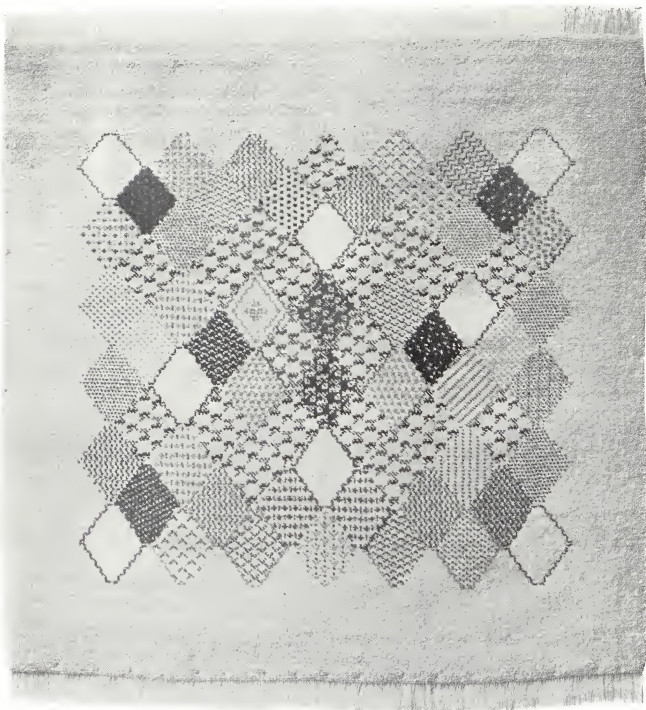


FIG. 9. KITTY VAN DER MYLL DEKKER—Carpet, exhibited in the New York Metropolitan Museum. The artist taught at the Institute of Applied Arts and the School for Feeble Minded in Amsterdam.

up the form which lends sensitiveness to his work and, last but not least, in a factory a piece of ceramic undergoes considerable less burning than in the small oven of a craftsman.

While working at the burning the artist keeps adding different materials in order to achieve color nuances. He "paints" when trying out different changes in the glazing. But what each stroke of the brush means for the painter, for the ceramist it means a whole new burning process. (Figs. 10, 11 and 12.)

The metal art forger beating into shape a flat metal plate achieves an entirely different effect than the machine which stamps and presses the object into the shape of a model. The hand product is beaten into shape by countless small blows of a hammer. (Figs. 13 and 14.) A machine requires only one stamp and the form is ready.

The Municipal Museum of Amsterdam has a permanent exhibition of arts and crafts. With demonstrations of good and bad examples, and organized lectures it portrays to the public the varying of applied arts produced by hand and those produced by machine. Its educational value goes even farther than sheer aesthetic appreciation, for knowledge of material and function is also provided. Without this understanding it is quite impossible to choose good objects of utility, or to make right choices when furnishing our interiors.

Lack of right inside avenges itself nowhere so strongly as in our interiors. The trinity, aesthetic conception, knowledge of material, and function, forms the basic value of an interior. These three are not only closely related but in the course of time they also undergo changes together. First the function changes because conditions of life change. In a later phase we find new materials at the disposal of the new function and in the



FIG. 10. BERT NIENHUIS—Vase, hand thrown fine stoneware—glaze: light and deep turquoise cracked.



FIG. 12. PIET WORMS—Ceramic figures. The Netherlands Government ordered many displays for exhibitions executed by well-known artists. Worms delineates folklore in a personal and attractive way.

FIG. 13. D. WITTEMAN—Fragment of iron fence, exhibited at the Netherlands Pavilion in Paris 1937.



FIG. 14. ELOY JAN AND LEO BROM—Madonna, executed and designed as hand wrought silver metalwork.

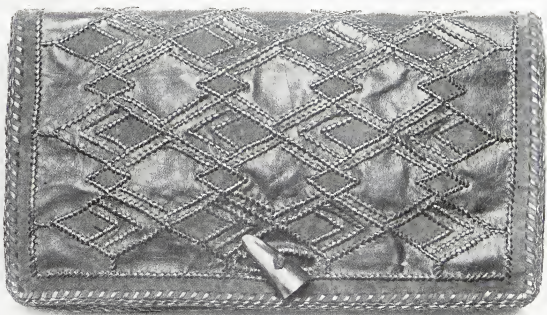


FIG. 15. J. LÜSKE—Leather handbag.



FIG. 16. BERTHA VON LOGHEM—Leather Handbag.



FIG. 17. HARRY VAN TUSSENBROEK—Marionette, which expresses a surprisingly powerful imagination.

last phase a new form of expression is found. But much time must pass before the three phases become a harmoniously developed unity.



Do you still remember the first autos? Those little vehicles without a horse? It took years until the car as we know it today acquired its own form. Still, this change happened rather quickly compared to the slowness of change in furniture. In the case of the car, once carriage and horse were forgotten, the imagination of the carosserie designer was set free to construct a vehicle symbolizing speed. Not so with furniture. When in

the last century new materials and new working methods penetrated production, people strove only to use these advantages to achieve cheaper production. Imitation of existing furniture forms was considered a commercial necessity, because such furniture represented a definite market value which manufacturers aimed to surpass with the new mechanically made products. The inferior quality of this product was accepted because of the financial advantages it offered. The same fatal influence of the machine was observed in the Dutch overseas dominions where the beautiful Malayan batik handicraft was superseded by the machine. The natives only wanted to buy the new cotton sarongs when they were exact copies of the old designs. No argumentation is needed to prove that these natives, being themselves masters in the art of batik, saw the difference between batik and print. But price advantage overshadowed demand for beauty.

The cheap mechanically produced furniture of the last century speedily changed the appearance of the interior. In earlier times the number of furniture pieces possessed by the burgher was rather limited because each





FIGS. 18, 19 AND 20. A. D. COPIER — Daily glassware executed by the glass factory "Leerdam."

piece of furniture represented a fine work of handicraft. On old paintings we see interiors with very few furniture pieces. Not much furniture was needed because children were not allowed to sit at the table. They had to stand up. A servant also was never offered a seat, not even in later times when the interiors were crowded with furniture. These manners originate from the time when interiors were furnished very sparingly.

The cheaper furniture, however, was within reach of everybody. The desire of everybody was to demonstrate the semblance of wealth. Thus originated the fashion of crowded interiors and imitation furniture style. The after-effect of this period is still to be felt in our days. The most ugly remnant is the furniture "set." The "set" was invented to facilitate low cost mass production and distribution. During the periods of handicraft only the necessary pieces of furniture were ordered. A careful and sparing way of furnishing the house was unnecessary when furniture became so much cheaper. Everybody bought a "set." A little money bought a lot of furniture to serve the purpose of the purchaser. But the greatest handicap in our times impeding new and better ideas, is the public itself. It stares itself blind at the pseudo-expensive looking furniture, instead of making use of available new possibilities. As far back as a hundred years ago it would have been possible to manufacture tubular metal furniture. Metal hospital beds date from this time. But the public did not react. It was too susceptible to imitations of old furniture. Plastic materials, too, were known fifty years ago, but used for purposes of insulating only. Even today people still shy away from this material for interiors or, if they use it, give it the look of some wood or metal.

At present we have at our disposition an unprecedented abundance of choice in materials and work meth-

ods which are not utilized, for unfortunately the public does not look for practical improvements though it may claim to do so. We contemplate the many possibilities of stamping or casting furniture. We think of pre-fabricated walls with built-in furniture units. We think of convertible partitions instead of walls which give the floor plan of the house a much greater flexibility. Much time must be allowed to pass, it seems, before our tastes will dare accept the true expressions of our day.

Suppose, attending a concert of contemporary composers, one hears a fugato in the style of Bach or tremolos which incite a trombone motive as Wagner used to do. One would pity the poor composer for failing to find his own expression. The temptation of St. Anthony is an old story. In different ages painters gave the legend a different treatment. In the Museum of Modern Art the version of the modern painter, Ensor, was once shown next to a reproduction of another version by the Medieval Dutch painter Hieronymos Bosch. Both pictures are typical expressions of their own time. Then too, how our manners vary in different times! The kneeling down to be dubbed to knighthood, the reverences of the quadrille, the handkiss and, alas, the Heil Hitler gesture characterize their time. Our ways of living are changing constantly. Different habits are dictated by different surroundings. Our fashions of sitting, resting, eating, talking determine the use of our furniture. The smaller and fewer rooms now at our disposal impress their own characteristic pattern of furniture use. The knight longed to express in his abode the strength of his fortress.

The "Grande Dame" of the Rococo wanted to express in her palace her far flung influence over king, people, art and science. The citizen, living after the French Revolution, tried to express in his home newly gained respect and prosperity. One should think the modern individual

looking forward to a "new order" of democracy and community spirit, should long to express his ideals in his home, too. But the inclinations of the average modern individual do not yet tend in this direction.

These observations hold for the average interior and its inhabitant. But the average never indicated the highest level of possible development. It is noteworthy of the Dutch that even their average interior gives evidence of more progressive ideas than in most other countries. In addition to this the number of their interiors above the standard of average is considerable. Dutch architecture developed to a high level and lifted interior architecture along with it. Movements which influenced architecture were also reflected in the development of the interior. At a time when architecture exaggerated honest construction, furniture construction followed suit and showed mortise and tenon, and dovetail joints as a kind of honor-decoration. When reaction overcame the overloaded and dressed up interior of the former generation, a puritan soberness dominated. But when again reaction set in and the architecture of the "Amsterdam School" granted free play to the imagination, shapes in the interiors, grew too luxurious.

Furniture was produced which looked as if it were cut out of rock to serve an Egyptian king rather than made from wood to serve the modest purpose of the common man. (Fig. 22.) This style only lasted for a short transitional period and was buried with the passing of its foremost inspirer, the architect M. de Klerk. Architecture then immediately developed a fanatical urge for functionalism and again the interior followed the new lead. Furniture was considered only an object of utility. For a very short time, even pictures were not allowed on walls and the only piece of decoration was the ever present cactus!



FIG. 22. M. DE KLERK—Furniture which looked as if it were cut out of rock to serve an Egyptian king rather than made from wood to serve the modest purpose of the common man.

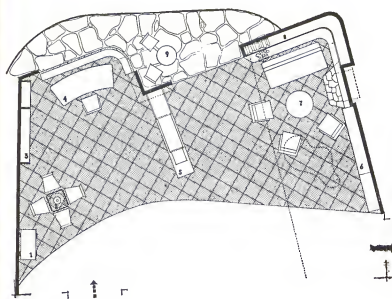


FIG. 24.

FIG. 23.

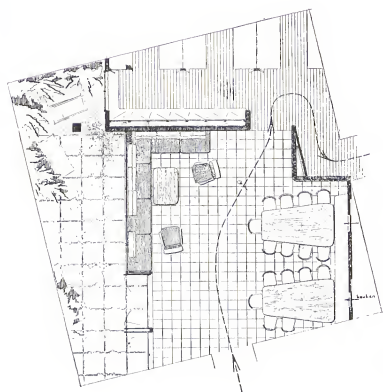
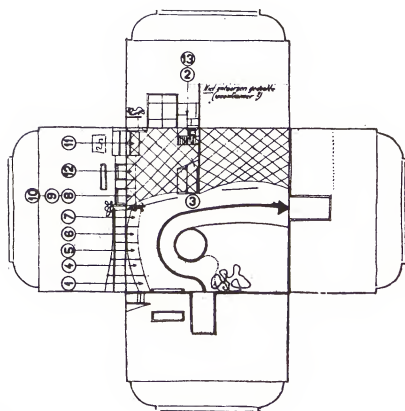


FIG. 25.

FIG. 26.

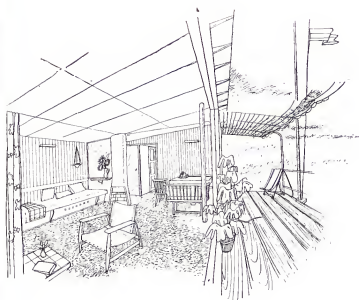
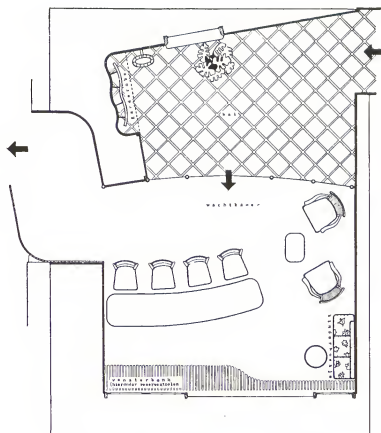


FIG. 27.

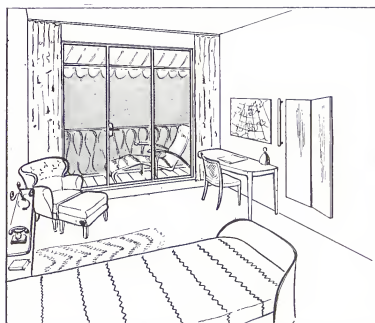


FIG. 28.

We have outlined here for you in broad strokes the movements which influenced the interior, but, of course, reaction was not always quite so pronounced. Just as a human being is not all bad or all good but has a disposition composed of manifold nuances, so also style is never solely decorative, solely constructive, solely functional. Here, too, are manifold nuances visibly merging one into another, forms of transition often coming to the fore. Especially in the interior we see transitional forms in which contours already have lost earlier harsh marks of obviousness and unnaturalness, because they impeded habitability. However, the great line of the development travels inevitably in the direction of functionalism although the movement has already lost quite a bit of its vital fighting power.

For a Dutchman, today, it goes without saying that an interior must be based on function. It is just as self-evident for him, that the professional assisting him to furnish his home, must start precisely with this assumption. The professional just continues the work of the architect and in many cases he works together with him. He is an architect of interiors and not a decorator of interiors. The difference in name typifies the difference in conception. The interior decorator starts with the wish to decorate. He takes care of decorations, gives the curtain a dramatic treatment, he works with mirrors, drapes and mantelpiece arrangements. The interior architect starts with the wish to meet the living requirement in every respect, yet by no means excluding utmost comfort and homeliness. This cannot be better demonstrated than to give you a description of the great exhibition "In Holland staat een Huis" which was planned for the end of May, 1940, in the Municipal Museum of Amsterdam, though tragically this truly magnificent

enterprise was shattered by the unholy invasion of Holland.

With the support of the government and the municipality of Amsterdam, there had been collected a considerable amount of money for a large scale interior exhibition in the Municipal Museum of Amsterdam. A specific problem was assigned for competition. The winner was entitled to a government order allowing him to execute his own plans. Thirty architects were invited to compete. Not only were the plans completed, but execution, too, already had begun when the invasion of Holland occurred. Part of the exhibition was devoted to low-cost housing.

Good and bad examples of furnished kitchens were to be presented by K. Limberg, one of the outstanding young architects of Holland. He was shot as a hostage December 1943, by the Germans.

CHILDREN'S PLAYROOM

The architect realized that it was absurd to imitate furniture forms used for grown-ups, and merely reduce the scale to have them look as cute as possible. Instead he took as a starting point a list of all activities which children might want to undertake in the room. (See floorplan, Fig. 23, architect J. P. Kloos.)

LIVINGROOM

The room is planned for a family with two or three children. The father needs space for writing and study. Because he plays chamber music once a week with his



FIG. 29a. Room for a collector in the year 1880.



FIG. 29. A. BODON—Attic room planned for a collector. Requirements as drawers for prints, etc., are fulfilled in the architectural plan. Exhibited in the Municipal Museum of Amsterdam as a contrast to the also exhibited "antique" collector's room (see Fig 29a) which hampers a harmonious display.



FIG. 30a. Bedroom in the year 1880.



FIG. 30. A. BODON—Bedroom executed in rattan. Exhibited in the Municipal Museum of Amsterdam as a contrast to the dusty and overloaded bedrooms of a former generation (see Fig. 30a).

friends, space for such a group must be provided. Furthermore, allowance is made for storage capacity for the work of the mother and the children. 1. Tea-trolley; 2. quartet-group; 3. Bookshelves with sides of twisted ropes (fishing net); 4. Worktable with storage capacity for magazines and newspapers; 5. Cupboard for storage with a hinged shelf to serve as a writing desk for the housewife; 6. Built-in bookshelves; 7. Sitting corner near the open fire, niche in wall for books; built-in space on top for transparent photographs; 9. Little sitting corner in the terrace. (See floorplan, Fig. 24, architect Paul Bromberg.)

YOUTH HOSTEL

The task was to lend to the interior the spirit of a youth hostel. The main accent had to be on the common activities in this room where dining, resting and entertaining took place. Sleeping possibilities had to be provided, too. The room had to be light and pleasant. A couch and easy chairs were required. Also tables and chairs near the kitchen serving window. A brick stove tended from the kitchen, especially needed for drying clothes. Sleeping place with two rows of bunks. (See floorplan, Fig. 25, architect M. Stam.)

WAITING ROOM OF A DOCTOR

The interior of the waiting room is dominated by the thought that patients need not stare into each others faces. There are two easy chairs and one big reading table with a row of light chairs. Some extra chairs could be put under the windowsill. There is also a small bench

for children with a little table and toys. All furniture is planned in elmwood. Top of reading table is of linoleum. (See floorplan, Fig. 26, architect H. Salomonson.)

WEEKEND HOUSE

Parents sleep in the livingroom on the turned-over mattresses of the couch. The dining corner is separated by a curtain making it possible for the children to have an early breakfast without disturbing the parents. In case all want an early breakfast or unexpected visitors come early, the beds of the parents, if not yet made, can be hidden by a curtain near the couch. Children and guests sleep in the small bedroom. Placing of two beds on top of each other at each side of the room is possible. Everybody washes in the shower. Clothes hang in the general closet which is big enough for the clothes of the whole family. (See floorplan, architect A. Bodon.)

HOTELROOM

The floorplan of this room is adapted to the demands of a hotel room. The hotel room is next to a bathroom (with W. C. and shower) and a little hall leading to the outside. Both serving as sound-proof sluices. The planning of the room is done with a view to all expected activities, especially packing and unpacking of trunks. Bench for trunks, closet and bed are arranged in a way to avoid much running around. The closet is built-in, because a loose closet is considered an obstacle in such a room. It has three doors and partitions for hanging and placing of things. Near the porch is the living side

of the room. There is a writing table which serves also as a vanity, a rather long, double mirror which can be folded together, a low easy chair with loose footstool, books, etc., a long small table with a phone which can also be reached from the bed. (See floorplan, Fig. 28, architect Ida Falkenberg-Liefrink.)

The main theme of the exhibition was that "utility" and not merely a beautiful "set" is essential in a home. Twice a year the "Grand Palais" in Paris offered elaborate exhibitions on the art of interiors. But these presented a show only and never a guide. They did not suggest real life. The interiors shown were not examples of utility but of sensual imagination, sometimes fascinating, sometimes ridiculous because of exaggerated affectation. They did not influence the solution of the housing problem for the French people. The exhibition in Amsterdam, on the other hand, would have proven that people in Holland were already far advanced in their living arrangements. Pioneers are able to launch a new movement, to dispose of outlived traditions; but only the people can create a new culture. If the people do not take over the new idea and put it into effect in every day life, art remains artificial.

During these deeply depressing days which now are our lot, we do not expect decorative art to spread its wings. The reign of brutal force suppresses Dutch life and the utterances of its culture. But with its unconquerable sense of independence Holland will rise again and its culture will find a new expansion. With full confidence we look towards the future.



FIG. 31. MAASKANT AND VAN TYEN—The architects task was the remodeling of an useless attic into a sunny one. The radiator is hung to make floor cleaning easier. The walls, against which plants are placed, are covered with tiles.

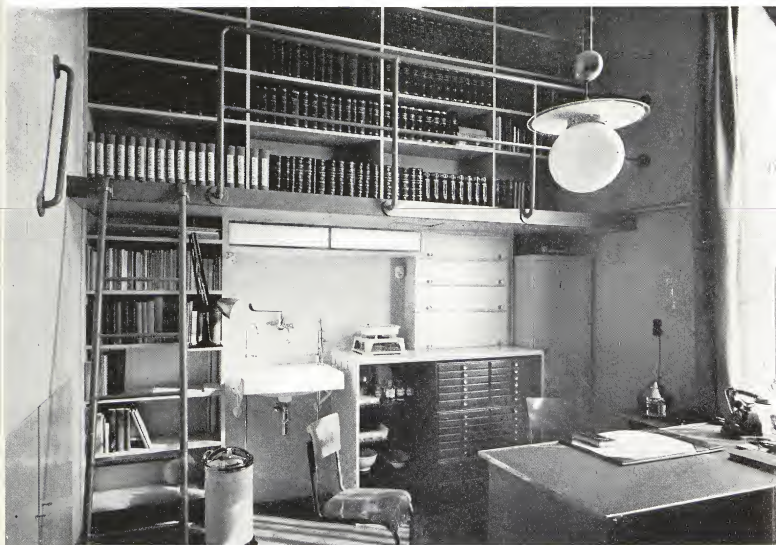


FIG. 32. PAUL BROMBERG — Remodeled doctor's room. The task was to provide storage capacity instead of decorating. The high ceiling made a gallery for books possible.



FIG. 33. J. J. P. OUD—Swimming pool S.S. "Nieuw Amsterdam" of the Holland-America Line, now in use as a hospital ship. Harmonious space rendering and organic architecture instead of decorative treatments.

FIG. 34. PAUL BROMBERG—Open fire with built-in storage for books, music, records, instrument.

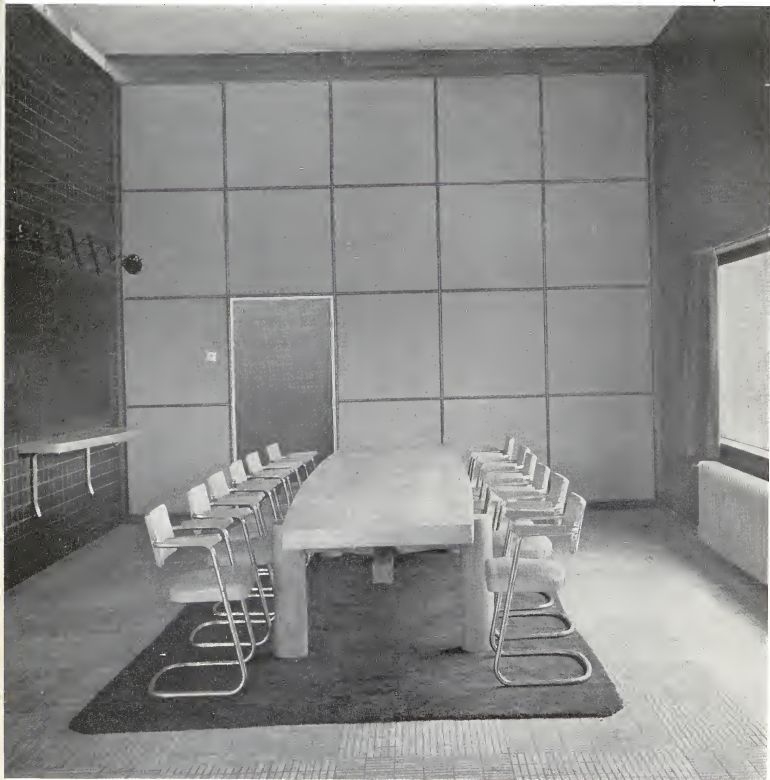


FIG. 35. MAASKANT AND VAN TYEN — Interior of the aeronautical laboratory. The Hague, 1940. The rendering of space is supported by the rendering of the different materials used for wall and floor surfaces as floor brick, wall tiles, leather covered wall, plain woolen rug.



FIG. 36. S.S. NIEUW AMSTERDAM—Theater. More than a hundred Dutch designers designed the interiors of this "Floating Palace of Art" as the "STUDIO" magazine described this ocean liner of the Holland America line.

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